NCA
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NEW SPANISH CONSTITUTION ON SCHEDULE

ANNCR:

SPAIN MAY HAVE A NEW DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION AS EARLY AS NEXT OCTOBER....AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY HARRY DEBELIUS IN MADRID.

VOICE:

AS AN AMERICAN, THIS CORRESPONDENT FOUND IT SOMETWHAT AUSPICIOUS THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON SPAIN'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTION GOT UNDER WAY ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, INDEPENDENCE DAY FOR AMERICANS. THE DRAFT OF THE CONSTITUTION CONSISTS OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-TWO ARTICLES, AND THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES IS DISCUSSING THEM, ONE BY ONE.

LAST WEEK SPANISH LEGISLATORS BEGAN TO TRADE THEIR BITTEREST WORDS IN THE POST FRANCO ERA. THE STUMBLING BLOCK WAS THE WORDING OF ARTICLES RELATING TO REGIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, AND THE BASQUES WERE DISTINCTLY UNHAPPY. THE BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY THREATENED TO WALK OUT OF CONGRESS, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT FOUND ITS HANDS TIED, AS FAR AS GRANTING MORE CONCESSIONS TO THE BASQUES WAS CONCERNED, BECAUSE THERE WAS STRONG PRESSURE FROM CERTAIN MILITARY LEADERS WHO FELT THAT TOO MUCH OPENHANDENESS WITH THE BASQUES MIGHT DISRUPT NATIONAL UNITY. YET MOST OF THE PARLIAMENT REALIZED THAT NATIONAL UNITY MIGHT BE IN GREATER PERIL IF THE BASQUES AS A BLOCK SHOULD REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE NEW CONSTITUTION. IN THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES, BASQUE RESISTANCE TO THE MADRID GOVERNMENT COULD ONLY BE EXPECTED TO INCREASE, AND VIOLENT SEPARATIST ORGANIZATIONS WOULD STAND TO GAIN MORE POPULAR SUPPORT IN THE BASQUE PROVINCES.

BUT, EVERYONE FROM THE KING DOWN IS REASONABLY OPTIMISTIC HERE IN MADRID ABOUT CLEARING THE HURDLES AND FINISHING THE CONSTITUTION, BECAUSER THERE IS A COMMON WILL TO DO SO. HOWEVER, THE EXTREME LEFT HAS NOT MADE ANY PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT WHETHER IT WILL SUPPORT THE CONSTITUTION. IT PROBABLY WILL NOT. THAT, OF COURSE, DOES NOT INCLUDE THE SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY, ONE OF THE STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION.

THE FAR RIGHT, REPRESENTED BY THE FASCIST PARTY NEW FORCE, HAS ALREADY MADE IT PLAIN THAT IT OPPOSES THE CONSTITUTION. BUT THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE IT OPPOSES WESTERN STYLE DEMOCRACY TO BEGIN WITH. THE SOCIALISTS HAVE SOME STRONG RESERVATIONS ABOUT CERTAIN THINGS, SUCH AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE OF STATE FUNDS FOR PRIVATE AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. BUT THEY ARE EXPECTED TO ASK THEIR PARTY MEMBERS TO VOTE YES WHEN THE REFERENDUM COMES UP.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE REGARDING REGIONAL AUTONOMY OR HOME RULE IS A BIT TOO STRONG FOR THE CONSERVATIVE POPULAR ALLIANC PARTY. BUT, IN THE END, THE PARTY WILL ALSO PROBABLY CALL ON ITS MEMBERS FOR AN AFFIRMATIVE VOTE. SO WILL PRIME MINISTER ADOLFO SOARES'S PARTY, THE CENTER DEMOCRATIC UNION.

THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES DEBATE IS SCHEDULED TO WIND UP BY THE END OF JULY. AFTER THAT, THE TEXT APPROVED BY THE CONGRESS GOES TO THE SPANISH SENATE. BY THE END OF AUGUST, THE SENATE'S CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE SHOULD BE OVER. THEN, ALLOWING A FEW WEEKS TO IRON OUT ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VERSIONS APPROVED BY THE TWO HOUSES, THE CONSTITUTION WILL BE READY FOR SUBMISSION TO THE SPANISH PEOPLE. THEY ARE LIKELY TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT THE PROPOSED BASIC LAW OF THEIR COUNTRY SOMETIME IN OCTOBER.

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